**Act I, Macbeth**

**Language**

Often, people refer to the three ‘weird’ sisters as witches, although in no place in the text does Shakespeare actually refer to them as such. In fact, even the word ‘weird’ is a modern day substitution for the word ‘weyward’ which, by definition describes them as outcasts of society, not necessarily ‘witches’. Either way, there is no dispute that Shakespeare intended to create these three characters as odd and perverse. One of the best ways to study the difference between the three sisters and other characters is by looking at how their language is different than the others. Pay close attention to when the sisters speak and write down three observable differences in the delivery of language. (Do not write direct quotes, just conclusions you draw.)

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| **Witches** | **Other Characters** |
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**Paradoxical Language**

The sisters’ language is dominated by unusual paradoxes (contradictory statements that both contain elements of truth). Find two examples and speculate how both statements could possibly be true.

|  |
| --- |
| 1. |
| 2. |

**Act I, Macbeth**

**Masculinity**In today’s world, the definitions and expectations of being either male or female are difficult to distinguish. Old traditions of what a man should ‘talk like’ or how a female should ‘act like’ are becoming more and more obsolete. However, during Shakespeare times, there was no doubt that a man’s ‘manliness’ was measureable. There were very clear expectations as to the role men played in upholding the structure of society. In fact, when looking at any of Shakespeare’s plays, one will note the pattern of main male characters whose manhood is threatened, questioned, or tested. No play demonstrates the pressure men had to endure in society like Macbeth. While Macbeth falls into the category of yet ‘another’ guy trying to defend his manly honor, Shakespeare does something very different with this tradition of patriarchal power: he invents a female character who encompasses more ‘manliness’ than any other man in the play, including her husband. It appears that even 400 years ago, Shakespeare was starting a conversation about the rigidity of gender roles and how perhaps, women had abilities far more powerful than their counterparts.

A ‘real’ man of the 17th century should…

1. Take on the role of the decision maker/leader in church, government, or family as it is the ‘natural order’ God wanted.
2. Engage in heroic violence (violence that is legitimized when defending honor or justice).
3. Practice and value loyalty above all things. Loyalty and defending the king (who God appointed) is the man’s number one priority. There is no criminal more despicable than a traitor.
4. Live an honorable life where their word (promise, bond, verbal contract) is always good.
5. When faced with fear or doubt, overcome those weak emotions with courage.

Activity: After completing Act I, identify how each character meets or fails in the five categories.

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| --- | --- |
| **Macbeth** | **Lady Macbeth** |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |
| 5. |  |

**Act I Macbeth**

**Dramatic Irony**

Sometimes while viewing a play, the audience is placed in the position of knowing more than the characters onstage. For example, we might know that around the corner is someone with a gun, but the characters are unaware and go to walk around the corner. This creates dramatic tension between the characters’ limited knowledge and our greater knowledge. Whether we like it or not, we cannot help but want to warn the character. It’s giving the audience the knowledge, but not allowing them to use it when using it could divert catastrophe. Dramatic irony is a terrific technique that makes the play interesting and engages the audience into the lives of the characters.

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| **Speaker & Audience** | **Quote** | **How Audience Receives** | **How Speaker Intended** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
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**Tragic Flaws**

In Shakespeare’s plays, the main characters are usually destroyed by their own tragic flaws. These flaws are typically emotions that despite even the strongest restraint, come through anyway. Often the characters are very aware of their ‘weakness’ and try to control it; that is, until the ‘weakness’ starts dictating all of their decisions. In the box, identify Macbeth’s most apparent weakness. In the connecting boxes, identify what contributes to this weakness as seen in the play so far.

Creative Assignment Assessment

After reviewing Act I, you probably noticed that there are some really great lines in this play that really show off the topics we’ve reviewed for Act I. For your homework, I want you to create a cartoon storyboard for Act I that shows off your understanding of one of the topics you reviewed in this handout.

\*You can have some or all of characters use modern day language that echoes the spirit of the scene.

\*You can bring in a modern day person/tv show to serve as a character to make it funny.

\*You can choose a background that totally shifts the ‘tone’ of the scene to something lighter.

All you need to do is follow these directions and use your imagination.